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"Get Home Safely": A *Pedagogy of the Sacred* for Survival in a Divided Society

Abstract
Historically, Blacks have out of necessity prioritized survival in educating their younger generations for existence in the racially hostile and divided context of the U.S. This education and religious education has occurred formally and informally in homes, schools, community organizations, and in congregations. This paper examines three aspects of survival: survival and emancipatory education, survival and justice, and survival with emerging Black generations. Three examples will be offered that highlight each aspect of survival. The examples will demonstrate how education generally and religious education in particular has undergirded *pedagogies of the sacred* for the survival of Black life.

I. Introduction

The term "pedagogies of the sacred" as it is being used within the context of the 2019 REA Annual Meeting theme, "Coexistence in Divided Societies: Pedagogies of the Sacred, of Difference, and of Hope" refers to educational strategies that "initiate youngsters into religious and spiritual traditions, from the inside," i.e., from within faith-based institutions like church congregations and parochial schools.[1] This contrasts with "pedagogies of difference" that operate within non-parochial institutions and also educate, but do so from the vantage point of the larger society. The conference theme leans us toward the transformational possibilities of collaborative work between those positioned inside and outside to produce "pedagogies of hope," that transgress societal boundaries and divides.[2] Ultimately, the goal is to help facilitate the kind of conversations, research, and practices within the education field, religious education in particular, that begin to bridge gaps while eliminating the seemingly indomitable 'walls of hostility' that divide us, so we can collectively breathe and peacefully live together.

While neither the conference theme or the concept of *pedagogies of the sacred* is especially problematic, there is something that complicates both significantly. For some minoritized communities, like Blacks in the United States, the racialized tensions that divide U.S. society are (have been) so life-threatening and lethal that more often than not, strategies for survival must be prioritized over strategies for co-existence within the larger societal context. It could even be said that survival or the existence of Black life within the racist and white supremacist context of the U.S. *is* a strategy for co-existence given that minoritized communities must prioritize existence while they are determining the best ways to co-exist. The emphasis on survival reflects this kind of DuBoisian 'double consciousness'. More specifically here, it frames the *pedagogies of the sacred* or religious education in predominantly Black Christian settings in this country.

In this paper, I will examine the prevalence of the theme of survival in the *pedagogies of the sacred* within predominantly Black communities and religious contexts. I will approach the survival theme from the perspectives of survival and emancipatory education; survival and justice; and survival and emerging generations. Attention will be given to examples of each, namely, early educational settings for enslaved and free Blacks, the 1963 Birmingham Children's Crusade, and the 2015 "Get Home Safely" short film. These examples demonstrate that prioritizing survival has remained a steady and enduring need for Blacks in the U.S. in spite of the remarkable gains made toward racial co-existence in this country. The role of religious education will be highlighted in each example.

The use of the term 'education' in this paper will refer to general knowledge, basic life skills, religious education, and literacy training. This is an acknowledgement that Blacks saw an intrinsic relationship between education for the survival of Black life, for faith and freedom (spiritual and physical). Additionally, the lack of access to numerous settings for different types of learning prior to the 19th century, especially in the Southern states meant that opportunities for education usually served multiple purposes. Whenever Blacks gathered to worship in hidden

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[1] Religious Education Association Annual Meeting 2019 website at https://religiouseducation.net/rea2019/.

[2] Ibid.

spaces, it was not unusual for the time to also be used strategizing and planning in addition to teaching, preaching, praying and singing.

II. *Pedagogies of the Sacred* for Survival

In the summer of 2013, I entered the area of the Elmina Castle in Elmina, Ghana where Black African men and women were incarcerated prior to their transport by ships for transatlantic journeys to literal and figurative deaths. All experienced some form of "spirit-murder."[3] I was stunned by the sight of a former church building in the middle of the inner courtyard. There was something disorienting and unsettling about its center location; the cared-for plants positioned in the front of the building; and the building's columns of colored brick in the midst of the other dulled white, washed-out (white-washed) buildings or "slave dungeons".[4] Everything suggested that the building had housed whiteness. It had housed something that was off-limits to non-whites, like education, worship, comfort, human dignity. The building, originally owned by the Portuguese in the 15th century, was later rebuilt into a church after the Dutch triumph over the Portuguese. Inside that building, human traffickers, church missionaries, clerics, etc. had worshipped and taught while Black bodies were crammed mercilessly into inhumane cavernous spaces beneath it and around it, each being denied the basic necessities of life.

The captured Africans were not privy to participation in any of the Christian practices or rituals observed in this church. However, the behavior of their captors taught them something about their captors' values and religious beliefs. The Christian religion that these Africans were exposed to at Elimina Castle and other African ports for Black transatlantic trade would later be woven into the *pedagogies of the sacred* of the whitened Christian religion that circumscribed Black enslaved reality in the U.S. Enslaved Blacks would have to survive the implementation of these 'pedagogies' by the flesh-and-blood representatives of Christianity who profited from Black enslavement by Word and whip.

Thus, survival of Black life has been a consistent agenda item for Blacks in this country since their 17th century arrivals in the country. Not only did Blacks have to strategize for physical existence, they had to construct systems of values and beliefs for spiritual sustenance within systems designed to destroy them. Remarkably, they developed interpretive models reminiscent of Yolanda Y. Smith's "triple-heritage" Christian education model that addressed key components of their new African American personhood.[5] The tripartite model of these enslaved Blacks consisted of remnants of their imported African worldview, their new African American realities of enslavement and commodification and a "politics of refusal" that refuted the whitened Christianity transmitted to them.[6] Their models also made room for ancestral truths

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[3] Bettina L. Love, *We Want to Do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2019), 34-39.

[4] cf. Fundiswa A. Kobo, "Black Women's Bodies as Reformers from the Dungeons: The Reformation and Womanism." *HTS Teologiese Studies*, vol. 74, no. 3, (2018): e1–e9; DOI: https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v74i3.5015. Accessed August 13, 2019.

[5] Yolanda Y. Smith, *Reclaiming the Spirituals: New Possibilities for African American Christian Education* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2004), 12-13.

[6] Love, 52.

about a God who was working on their behalf in a hostile land. Dwight N. Hopkins discusses this early process of Blacks 'co-constituting' themselves. He states:

> …we find enslaved Africans and African Americas re-creating themselves with divine purpose…To carry out this re-creation process, they had to lay a firm foundation that acted as the substructure upon which they could then imagine, build, and refine methods of the self—seizing sacred domains, the divine right to resist, and constructing a syncretized religion. This foundation or substructure was made up of their common-sense folk wisdom, a reinterpretation of the Christianity presented to them by the slave masters, and aspects of African religions.[7]

What emerged from their work were *pedagogies of the sacred* grounded in a liberative hermeneutic they employed in interpreting God, their existence, and their oppressors.

Blacks were astute enough to reject the curated biblical literacy taught by whites. Many enslaved and free Blacks survived because they applied their liberating hermeneutic to their *pedagogies of the sacred* that included oral and embodied practices in formal and informal spaces, e.g., singing the Spirituals, dancing the ring shouts, praying to God, whispering plans for escape, secretly learning to read and write. The drumbeats of survival and freedom in these practices summoned them to life repeatedly, echoing an insistence that God wanted freedom and full-bodied humanity for them on earth. Even when singing about life after death, the Spirituals of enslaved Blacks taught about a liberative theological imagination. Howard Thurman affirms this in his explication of the Spiritual, "Heaven! Heaven!". Thurman described the song as a "protest" song that cast a vision of future time of freedom in God's presence, "a time when there shall be no slave row in the church, no gallery set aside for the slave, no special place, no segregation, no badge of racial and social stigma, but complete freedom of movement."[8]

There are numerous instances of *pedagogies of the sacred* within predominantly Black educational contexts that centered on and/or were informed by the theme of survival. I turn now to contexts for emancipatory education as contributors to the survival of Black life.

III. Survival and Emancipatory Education

> Access to the written word, whether scriptural or political, revealed a world beyond bondage in which African Americans could imagine themselves free to think and behave as they chose. Literacy provided the means to write a pass to freedom, to learn of abolitionist activities, or to read the Bible. Because it most often happened in secret, the very act of learning to read and write subverted the master-slave relationship and created a private life for those who were owned by others. Once literate, many used this hard-won skill to disturb the power relations between master and slave, as they fused their desire for literacy with their desire for freedom.[9]

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[7] Dwight N. Hopkins, *Down, Up, and Over: Slave Religion and Black Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 108.

[8] Howard Thurman, *Deep River and the Negro Spiritual Speaks of Life and Death* (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1975), 44.

[9] Heather Andrea Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 7.

Historian Heather Andrea Williams documents how passionately enslaved and free Blacks yearned for the kind of education that equipped them with knowledge for faith in God, for freedom, for survival. Blacks exercised extraordinary courage and creativity in their efforts to learn to read and write before and after Emancipation. Archaeologists were reportedly amazed to discover "the remains of graphite pencils and writing slates, some with words and numbers still written on them" at the recovered cabins of enslaved Blacks.[10] Former slaves testified to hiding books, memorizing the conversations they overheard between whites, even trading personal items for reading lessons.[11] Literacy facilitated survival and freedom for individuals and the community.[12] Williams claims that "in the Bible, books, and newspapers, literate slaves found a language of liberation that augmented what they learned in slave quarters."[13]

Enslaved Blacks were taught reading and sometimes writing by whites and children. They taught themselves and were taught by other Blacks. Freed Blacks are attributed with the success of educational initiatives like the post-Emancipation Sabbath schools which offered religious instruction and literacy training to newly freed Blacks. They provided teachers, administrators, and substantial financial support.[14] In their autobiographies, Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington highlight the role that Sunday or Sabbath schools played in educating Blacks. Douglass taught enslaved Blacks in a Sabbath school.[15] Douglass and Washington attest to the regular use of Bibles *and* spelling books in these settings. According to Washington, "the principal book studied in the Sunday school was the spelling book."[16]

Admittedly, the idea of Sunday schools offering religious instruction and literacy training was not new. The earliest Sunday schools that appeared in the U.S. were based on the Robert Raikes' late 18th century proposal in Gloucester, England to establish schools on Sunday that addressed the issue of poor youth using their idle time on Sundays to engage in activities that Raikes and others considered disruptive. He started Sunday schools to instill in these youth what he perceived to be the core competencies of a good citizenry, i.e., possessing some religious knowledge, socially acceptable behavior and basic literacy skills. The earliest U.S. Sunday schools in the North emulated Raikes' socializing goals for poor children.[17] Unlike their English counterparts, these Sunday schools placed a greater emphasis on Protestant Christianity and were

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[10] Williams, 20-21.

[11] Ibid., 7-29.

[12] Janet Duitsman Cornelius, *When I Can Read My Title Clear: Literacy, Slavery, and Religion in the Antebellum South* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 3.

[13] Williams, 24.

[14] James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 12-15.

[15] Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (Boston: Anti-slavery Office, 1847), 80-82.

[16] Booker T.Washington, *Up from Slavery: An Autobiography* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1907), 30. See https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/washington/washing.html#washing23.

[17] Anne Boylan, *Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution, 1790-1880* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 6-8.

included white and Black poor youth. Ultimately, racism overshadowed economic class when leaders attempted to bring middle class white children and poor Black youth under one educational roof.[18] In the South, the racial lines of separation were more entrenched and their motives were clearer.

The education in the Sunday schools supported by Blacks in the 19th century differed from the ones led by whites in that theirs had an emancipatory orientation. Blacks offered religious teaching and literacy training designed to prepare Blacks for their lives as free men and women. They were not concerned about forming model evangelical Protestants who looked and acted a certain way, but remained economically disadvantaged and powerless. As Williams notes, "African Americans had their own visions of freedom. They had had generations to contemplate a world in which they could claim the benefits of their own labor and make choices for themselves and their children."[19] Receiving education in these Sunday schools with emancipatory *pedagogies of the sacred* meant gaining skills for survival and freedom. Future generations of Blacks would benefit from their legacy. These generations would consist of young people whose survival would depend on receiving religious education that equipped them for prophetic witness and social action.

IV. Survival and Justice

On the morning of September 15, 1963, a bomb exploded in the16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. It killed four young Black girls (Addie Mae Collins, 14; Carol Denise McNair, 11; Carole Robertson, 14; Cynthia Wesley, 14) and seriously wounded others including Sarah Collins, the 12-year-old sister of Addie Collins. The 2014 movie *Selma*, directed by Ava Duvernay, depicted the girls wearing their 'Sunday best' attire of white dresses with matching gloves and shoes and crowned with meticulously coiffed hair. They had probably already attended Sunday school and were waiting for the start of the morning worship service when the bomb detonated at 10:22am. The 16th Street Baptist Church had not been bombed before, but its members understood the risks and costs associated with its involvement in the Civil Rights Movement. Despite the costs, the church did not relent in its commitment to social justice for the Blacks of Birmingham. In fact, earlier that same year, hundreds of youth, some younger and some older than the four murdered girls, had filled that church and other Black Birmingham churches, on their way to flooding the city's streets and jails on behalf of racial justice.

Masses of Birmingham Black youth prioritized justice for the betterment of Black life over the course of the crusade. Popular radio disc jockey, "Tall Paul" White, set the youth in motion on May 2 at noon with his radio announcement: "Kids, there's gonna be a party at the park…Bring your toothbrushes because lunch will be served."[20] Youth left their classrooms and other locations to gather at designated launch sites like 16th Street Baptist Church where they

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[18] Robert W. Lynn and Elliott Wright, *The Big Little School: Sunday Child of American Protestantism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 13-15.

[19] Williams, 43.

[20] Rufus Burrow Jr. and Michael G. Long. *A Child Shall Lead Them: Martin Luther King Jr., Young People, and the Movement* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 123.

received marching orders for the day. The youth's civil disobedience resulted in many of them being assaulted, arrested and detained in overcrowded cells with inadequate provisions. Yet, each day of the action youth continued to join their peers in a protest that led to an estimated 10,000 youth being arrested.[21] These children and youth are attributed with the eventual success of the Birmingham action.

Martin Luther King, Jr. and other adult movement leaders initially rejected the idea of using children in their failing Birmingham action. But two young adult leaders, James Bevel and Diane Nash Bevel, persuaded them otherwise.[22] In Burrow's account of the march, James Bevel called out the hypocrisy of Black Baptist clergy who accepted youth as members in their churches based on their professions of faith, but then questioned their capacity to decide to join the movement. He forcefully inquired "whether King or anybody else in the room wanted to deny the children the right to live their faith through crusading against injustice."[23] King changed his position.

Testimonies from adults who were youth participants in the Birmingham Children's Crusade affirmed that the *pedagogies of the sacred* of Black churches influenced their decisions to participate in the protest. Washington Booker III, who was 14 years old in 1963, shared with author Cynthia Levinson that he learned one of his favorite bible stories at the Zion Hill Baptist Church where he attended Sunday School. It was the biblical account of the three Hebrew boys who God protected and delivered when they were punished for holding fast to their commitments to God (Daniel 3). He also stated that,"without knowing it…they had prepared us to face a mighty enemy without fear. We were always taught that, if God was on your side, He would come and deliver you."[24] Levinson expands on the impact of the churches' *pedagogies of the sacred*, saying: "Whether they got it through mass meetings or Sunday school… (they) had faith in the knowledge that segregation was wrong and that God would protect them if they fought to destroy it."[25] Another youth, Audrey Faye Hendricks, who was a third grader in 1963, recalled regularly accompanying her parents to church and to mass meetings. Hendricks told Levinson: "It was no way for me not to really be involved. My parents were involved from the point that I could remember…My church was involved…You were there and just a part of it."[26]

The Black churches who supported the Birmingham Children's Crusade acted upon their belief that social engagement for justice aligned with the traditional practices of Christian faith communities. The teaching and preaching of these congregations embraced the thread of (diss)respectability or righteous indignation that runs through the biblical narratives. A history of Black resistance for survival and freedom also fueled their involvement. In their section on

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[21] David Halberstam, *The Children*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 1998), 441.

[22] Burrow, 109.

[23] Ibid., 109-110.

[24] Cynthia Levinson, *We've Got a Job: The 1963 Birmingham Children's March* (Atlanta, GA: Peachtree Publishers, 2011), 47.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid., 10-11.

"Christian Education in the Black Church Tradition," the authors of *Black Church Studies: An Introduction* assert:

> Taking seriously the need to teach its people to survive and to be faithful in the face of oppression and domination, the Black Church has become a problem-solving institution assisting its people in survival, resilience, faithful living, and hope…the Black Church articulates, rekindles, heals, and innovates its religious tradition and cultural identity for the present age while looking toward a hopeful future and coming generations. Christian education in the Black Church fosters the cultural and religious identity of its membership while equipping its people and healing them from the ravages of oppression…It is in community that strategies of survival and hope are passed from generation to generation. Teaching and learning occur as the problems of survival and faithfulness are negotiated and solved.[27]

When the opportunity arose to join the Birmingham Children's Crusade, the youth were more willing to participate than many adults were. They had grown up against the backdrop of racial segregation and other injustices toward Blacks in Birmingham. Some had learned from sermons, religious songs, and Sunday school lessons about a God who stood for justice. Some had witnessed police violence, racial hate crimes or had their personal safety threatened. Some knew about the arrests of and attacks against King and other religious leaders. The *pedagogies of the sacred* within the ecology of Black churches, community, family, and schools had taught them to connect the dots between God, justice, and social action. In other words, resistance against injustice was already in their blood along with an assurance of God's presence with them. Going to jail seemed like a reasonable expectation for the youth who had been baptized in social justice teachings through the church.

V. Survival and Emerging Generations

Keep your hands visible.
Don't make any sudden moves.
Only speak when they speak to you.[28]

> The *Talk* is akin to a rite of passage for many African-American children, especially boys and young men. Essentially, they are taught how to behave in the presence of police to mitigate potential harm: no sudden movements, don't question why you're being stopped, comply with all verbal commands, never raise your voice. Make it home alive.[29]

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[27] Stacey Floyd-Thomas, Juan Floyd-Thomas, Carol B. Duncan, Stephen G. Ray, Jr., Nancy L. Westfield, B*lack Church Studies: An Introduction* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 171-176.

[28] Angie Thomas, *The Hate U Give*. (London: Walker Books, 2017), 20.

[29] Arienne Thompson Plourde and Amelia Thompson, "The Talk: Surviving Police Encounters While Black" in *UTNE Reader,* Summer 2017, reprinted from *Notre Dame Magazine* at *https://www.utne.com/community/police-racial-discrimination-zm0z17uzcwil*.

Michael Brown was 18 years old and unarmed when he was killed by a white police officer in Ferguson, Missouri on August 9, 2014. His death stoked the blaze that had been ignited in 2012 with the death of 17-year old Trayvon Martin, an unarmed Black young man killed by a white neighborhood watch person in Sanford, Florida. Unfortunately, their stories are not anomalies. Since Martin and Brown's death, similar encounters between police and Black youth and young adults have escalated, often ending in the deaths of young Black males. These incidents have reached near epidemic numbers that suggest an unwelcome truth in the 21st century: Black youth and young adults are not safe in the U.S. Current statistics about Blacks and police killings point to the need for a retrieval of the resourcefulness of previous generations of Blacks who also needed to focus on physical survival.[30]

After Brown's murder, David Miller, the founder of the *Dare to be King Project*[31] developed an infographic entitled, "10 Rules of Survival If Stopped by Police."[32] Miller's survival guidelines stress compliance, avoiding confrontation and resistance of the police, and being aware of one's rights when encountering police as survival tactics. The tenor of Miller's rules echo versions of survival 'talks' from previous decades that offered instructions like: Do not look white people directly in their eyes. Keep your hands in your pockets. Lower your head and respond to whites with "yes, ma'am" and "no, sir". Get home before dark. His guide resonated broadly, conjuring memories of the 1955 murder of Emmitt Till and the 2012 murder of Rekia Boyd.[33]

Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, Illinois sponsored a series of educational sessions for Black families, youth and young adults in December of 2014 in recognition of the disproportionate probability that Black youth and young adults in the church and community would have encounters with police that lead to trauma, violence and/or death. Miller's infographic was a part of the sessions. Dr. Frank Thomas, a faculty member of Christian Theological Seminary in Indiana was in attendance during the series. According to Thomas, the grand jury's failure to indict Brown's killer sent him back to Miller's brochure which he had received at Trinity. Upon rereading the rules, he "recognized immediately its power to save lives, and felt the need to get it in front of as many people as possible."[34] That idea generated a creative collaboration between Trinity UCC, CTS, WFYI, an Indianapolis public radio station and the

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[30] "Fatal Force 2019 Report", *Washington Post*, September 12, 2019 at https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/national/police-shootings-2019/. Accessed September 13, 2019.

[31] David Miller, *Dare to be King Project* at http://daretobeking.net/about-us/david-miller/.

[32] See Appendix.

[33] cf. Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw and Andrea J. Ritchie with Rachel Anspach, Rachel Gilmer and Luke Harris, "Say Her Name: Resisting Police Brutality Against Black Women," *The African American Policy Forum and Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies,* 2015 at http://static1.squarespace.com/static/53f20d90e4b0b80451158d8c/t/560c068ee4b0af26f72741df/1443628686535/AAPF_SMN_Brief_Full_singles-min.pdf.

[34] Sara Griffith Lund, "Why 'Get Home Safely: 10 Rules of Survival' Matters," *HuffPost*, January, 16, 2015, updated March 18, 2015 at https://www.huffpost.com/entry/why-10-rules-of-survival_b_6485724. Accessed April 28, 2019.

SALT Project, a film and production company to produce the short video, "Get Home Safely: 10 Rules of Survival."[35]

The film features Black youth and young adults taking turns reciting Miller's ten survival rules. Increased access to the film was facilitated through each institutional partner posting the film on their social media platforms. Since 2015, television has offered additional education around concerns related to black youth and police violence, e.g., "The Talk," a July 2017 Proctor and Gamble commercial (https://youtu.be/ovY6yjTe1LE);[36] "A Wayne Thanksgiving," a November 2017 Saturday Night Live skit with Chance the Rapper (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fK0OkpQ4vEU), and "Hope," a February 2016 episode of the *Black-ish* television series (https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x6lqd6l).

"Get Home Safely" is the outcome of an innovative collaboration that collapsed boundaries between four unlikely partners: a faith community, a seminary, and two secular institutions. The institutions united to achieve a common goal of educating for the survival of an increasingly endangered population of Black youth and young adults. For Trinity UCC, addressing police violence as a part of its Christian education mission was not a stretch. It was walking in historical precedents set by Black churches and communities whose *pedagogies of the sacred* did not parse out the themes of survival, justice and freedom from their religious education. The collaboration also aligned with CTS's mission "to form disciples of Jesus Christ for church and community leadership to serve God's transforming of the world."[37] Interestingly, Trinity UCC whose motto is "unashamedly Black and unapologetically Christian" did not have to water down or compromise its commitment to the survival of Black life in order to be a partner in this collaboration. Instead, the issue created allies or what educator Bettina Love calls "co-conspirators."[38] In other words, a value of a particular *pedagogy of the sacred*, the survival of Black life, became a shared value among different organizations (sacred and secular) that opened a path toward the creation of the "Get Home Safely" film, a product of a *pedagogy of hope.* At a minimum, one implication of the collaboration behind this film is the reminder that particularity and difference can be generative ground for constructive and hopeful dialogue.

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[35] "Get Home Safely: 10 Rules of Survival" at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wqJ-psD9vJw.

[36] https://www.campaignlive.com/article/why-p-g-stood-its-controversial-ad-the-talk/1485501

[37] Christian Theological Seminary website at https://www.cts.edu/about-christian-theological-seminary/.

[38] Love, 117-119.

VI. Conclusion

For the movement
For the heart
For the children
Surviving in the dark…
Surviving being dark…[39]

In this paper, I sought to explore how the theme of survival for Black life or existence has been realized in *pedagogies of the sacred* within some of the religious education (religiously educating) spaces in Black communities and churches. I claimed that for some communities, a privileging of existence had to preempt discussions about co-existence because of the threatened status of their exisence. My initial inspiration for this paper came from the reading the novel, *The Hate U Give* by Black Millennial, Angie Thomas. The protagonist of her novel is a Black female teen who is directly impacted by police violence. The novel and the 2018 movie adaptation of the novel got me thinking about how another generation is being forced to focus their energies on staying alive just as past generations of Blacks had done. I wanted to know: How did previous generations equip their youth to survive? How are we equipping our youth today? What role is (has) religious education playing in the preparation for the survival of Black life? The research was troubling in that it reminded me thatBlack people have been fighting to stay alive (survive) in the U.S. for along time. At the same time, I was also encouraged by the diverse ways that Black communities and Black churches have developed liberative *pedagogies of the sacred* to address different aspects of survival, e.g., survival in terms of emancipatory education, justice, and emerging generations.

In order to appreciate these efforts it was necessary to acknowledge that historically, education for knowledge, faith, freedom, and survival were not viewed by Blacks as separate categories. In other words, to talk about religious education in these contexts meant understanding that Blacks did not confine God to formal worship services in brick-and-mortars buildings. But they saw (see) God at work everywhere — in the hush arbors, on the escape routes to freedom, in the Sabbath schools, in the mass meetings and marches of the Civil Rights Movement, and in religious education seminars about encountering police. The three examples highlighted in this paper affirmed the importance of *pedagogies of the sacred* with similarly expansive views of religious education. On the one hand, there does appear to be a narrowing of the definition of 'religious' education in some spaces. This narrowing may be contributing to the religious divisiveness in this country. On the other hand, there continue to be predominantly Black churches like the historic 16th Street Baptist Church of the 60s and Trinity UCC of Chicago who have (had) a vision of religious education and *pedagogies of the sacred* that extend(ed) into spaces beyond the local congregations where they see God at work. Such vision positions *pedagogies of the sacred* to participate in generative collaborations like the one that produced "Get Home Safely." Such collaborations make room for *pedagogies of hope* to arise unexpectedly around shared values, bringing healing to the broken spaces of our society.

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[39] Jonathan Lykes and Onrae Lateal, "My Dark Skin," on *The Black Joy Experience* (2018).

As I end, I want to mention a book I came across while writing this paper. The book, *We Want to do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom,* is written by educator Bettina L. Love. She adeptly critiques how this country's educational system has failed Black children. Her analysis pushed me to think about *pedagogies of the sacred* going beyond survival to thriving. She also helped me identify how my discussion of *pedagogies of the sacred* had missed something vital for religious education within predominantly Black Christian communities. I had missed the necessity of teaching Black youth and young adults of faith about Black joy. Love offers this definition of Black joy:

> There is joy and then there is Black joy. Both are necessary for justice; however, Black joy is often misunderstood. Black joy is to embrace your full humanity, as the world tells you that you are disposable and that you do not matter. Black joy is a celebration of taking back your identity as a person of color and signaling to the world that your darkness is what makes you strong and beautiful. Black joy is finding your someplace and creating home places for others. Black joy is understanding and recognizing that as a dark person you come with grit and test because you come from survivors who pushed their bodies and minds to the limits for you to one day thrive.[40]

I began this paper with a clear focus on *pedagogies of the sacred* for the survival of Black like. I end with a call to myself (and others) to engage in future religious education research for Black youth and young adults that considers the role of Black joy.

[40] Love,120.

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APPENDIX

David Miller, “10 Rules of Survival If Stopped by Police”

1. Be polite and respectful when stopped by the police. Keep your mouth closed.
2. Remember that your goal is to get home safely. If you feel that your rights have been violated, you and your parents have the right to file a formal complaint with your local police jurisdiction.
3. Don’t, under any circumstance, get into an argument with the police.
4. Always remember that anything you say or do can be used against you in court.
5. Keep your hands in plain sight and make sure the police can see your hands at all times.
6. Avoid physical contact with the police. No sudden movements and keep hands out of your pockets.
7. Do not run even if you are afraid of the police.
8. Even if you believe that you are innocent, do not resist arrest.
9. Don’t make any statements about the incident until you are able to meet with a lawyer or public defender.
10. Stay calm and remain in control. Watch your words, body language, and emotions.